

Recent records and status of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in Iran

ABBAS ASHOORI, ALI KHANI, MEYSAM GHASEMI, KOROS RABIEE,
MEHRDAD MANSOORI, SEYED BABAK MUSAVI, ALIREZA HASHEMI
& FARSHAD ESKANDARI

The Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* has undergone a recent population decline and has been up-listed to critically endangered (BirdLife International 2008). The species breeds in the central steppes of Kazakhstan, with very small numbers in southern Russia (Sheldon *et al* in press). The bulk of the population migrates west from the breeding grounds, before heading southwest through Turkey and the Middle East to wintering grounds in northeast Africa, where they arrive from late October onward (Sheldon *et al* 2011). A small number of birds winter in the Arabian peninsula, in countries such as Oman and the United Arab Emirates (Sheldon *et al* in press). Some migrate south from the breeding grounds, to Pakistan and northwest India (Sheldon *et al* in press). The species is classified as a scarce and irregular passage migrant in Iran according to Scott & Adhami (2006). Roselaar & Aliabadian (2009) noted a record from 1886. Tohidifar & Zarei (2007) summarized known Iranian records 1950–2007. In the present paper we collate published information on Sociable Lapwing sightings in Iran with the latest observations and update the species' status in Iran.

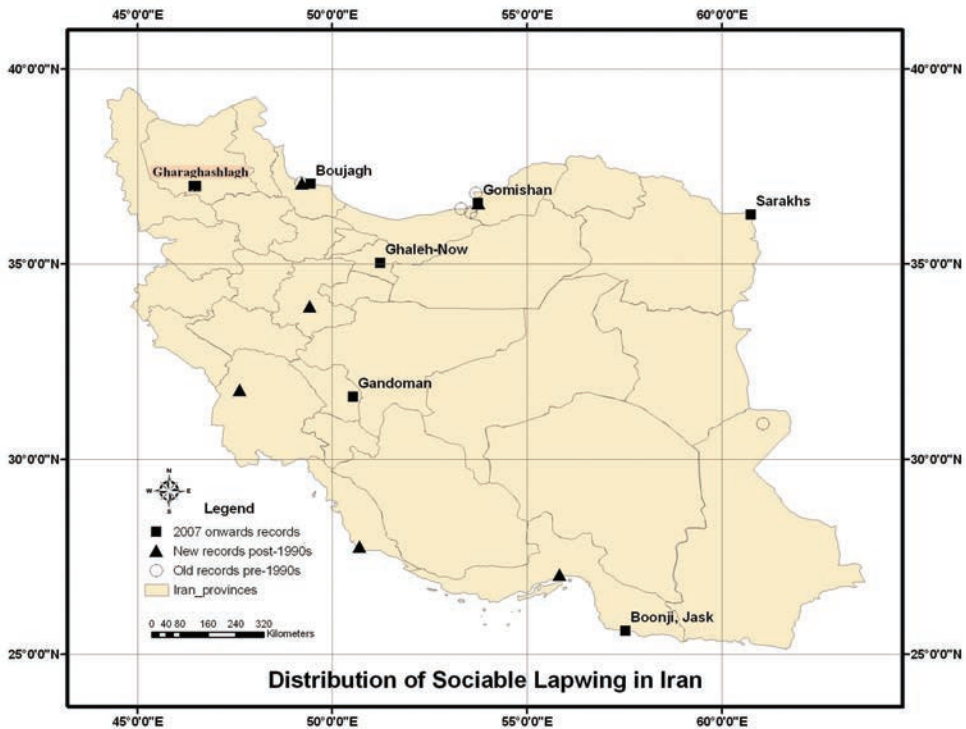


Figure 1. Distribution of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in Iran since 1950.

RECENT SIGHTINGS AND HABITAT ASSOCIATIONS

Monthly bird surveys of the Boujagh national park (37° 25' 44.5" N, 49° 56' 10.1" E, Gilan province, Figure 1) have been undertaken 2004–2011. In autumn of the years 2004–2007 and 2009–2010, 1–3 Sociable Lapwings were observed by AA (Table 1). In addition, two individuals were observed there 23–27 January 2009 by MD Bont, N Noordhof and AA (Table 1). All of these birds were observed on grassland, used as pasture, within the Boujagh NP (Plate 1) and in association with Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus*. The birds were always in close proximity though to wetland habitats (usually c50–100 m away). On 21 November 2011 in the Boujagh NP two individuals were observed roosting in close proximity to the Caspian sea, before moving c150 m to forage on grassland (Plate 2). Previously there were several observations, 1967–1998, of Sociable Lapwings from what became the Boujagh NP (Table 1, Tohidifar & Zarei 2007). In 2002, the Boujagh wetland area was designated a national park and thus has been protected by the Iranian department of the environment. Future management of the national park should take into account the regular occurrence of this critically endangered species, and suitable conservation measures implemented.

The Sociable Lapwing was recorded at the nearby Anzali wetland area, 40 km west of Boujagh NP, on at least four occasions 1967–1998 (Table 1). Far to the east of Boujagh NP, between the two wetlands of Miankaleh and Gomishan, two Sociable Lapwings were observed by KR 15 November 2007. The birds were observed foraging in ploughed farmland adjacent to Khajeh-Nafas village (37° 02' 26" N, 54° 03' 35" E). The feeding behaviour of the birds was observed for about one hour, and the main prey item appeared to be Mole Crickets *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*. On 10 March 2009, a Sociable Lapwing in summer plumage was observed by KR and MG in Miankaleh wildlife refuge (36° 50' 23.5" N, 53° 27' 48.7" E, Plate 3). Also one individual was photographed at the same area 16



Plate 1. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* at Boujagh NP, Iran, 27 November 2010. © Abbas Ashoori

Table 1. Records of the Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* in Iran since 1950. T&Z07 = refer to Table 1 in Tohidifar & Zarei (2007).

Site	Date	No. birds	Observer	Source
Gorgan bay, Bandar Gaz, Mazandaran	30 Nov 1952	1 male		T&Z07
Gorgan bay, Mazandaran	end Nov 1952	Small flock		T&Z07
Gorgan bay, Bandar Gaz, Mazandaran	end Nov 1953	Small flock		T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	13 Apr 1963	1		T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	16 Feb 1963	12		T&Z07
Near Bandar Anzali, Gilan	2 Apr 1967	1		T&Z07
Bandar Anzali, Gilan	25 Mar 1968	1	DA Ferguson	T&Z07
Bandar Anzali, Gilan	25 Apr 1969	8	DA Ferguson	T&Z07
Hamoun lake, Seistan & Baluchistan	2 Oct 1970	1 juv		T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	29 Oct 1971	1	DA Scott	T&Z07
Miankaleh peninsula, Mazandaran	19 Nov 1971	2	DA Scott	T&Z07
Bandar Abbas, Hormozgan	8 Sep 1998	1 ad		T&Z07
Kolvir, Bandar Anzali, Gilan	12 Sep 1998	2		T&Z07
Gomishan wetland, Golestan	April 1999	4		Ghaemi 2006
Gomishan, southern Caspian, Mazandaran	2 March 2001	1		T&Z07
Bamdej wetland, Khuzestan	Oct 2004	3		T&Z07
Boujagh NP, Gilan	autumn 2004–2006	2–3		Ashoori <i>et al</i> 2008
Mond protected area, Bushehr	13 Feb 2006	3	M Jamadi	T&Z07
Meyghan wetland, northeast of Arak, Markazi	1 Dec 2006	4		Tohidifar & Zarei 2007
Mond protected area, Bushehr	20 Jan 2007	1		T&Z07
Boujagh NP, Gilan	autumn 2007, 2009–2010 and 21 Nov 2011	1–2	AA	Gilan DoE files, AA
Boujagh NP, Gilan	23–27 Jan 2009	2	MD Bont, N Noordhof & AA	Gilan DoE files, AA
Khajeh-Nafas village, Mazandran	15 Nov 2007	2		KR
Miankaleh wildlife refuge, Mazandran	10 Mar 2009	1		KR, MG
Miankaleh wildlife refuge, Mazandran	16 Nov 2011	1		photographed by Gharabaghdost 2011
around Sarakhs, near Iran/Turkmenistan border	13, 14 Oct 2010	7		AK, SBM
around Eshq-Abad, Ghaleh-Now wetland, SE Tehran	Feb 2009	1		FE
Gandoman wetland, Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari	14 Nov 2007	2		MM
Boonji coast, Jask area, Hormozgan	8 Jan 2008	1	MG	Hormozgan DoE files, MG
Around Ghareh Gheslugh wetland, East Azarbaijan	5 Apr 2011	1		AH



Plate 2. Two Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius*, Boujagh NP coast, Iran, 21 November 2011. © Abbas Ashoori

November 2011 by Gharabaghdoost. Ghaemi (2006) reported 4 individuals in Gomishan wetlands in April 1999 (Table 1).

The regular records of Sociable Lapwing on pastoral land in close proximity to wetland areas suggests that such habitats may be important for the species as they migrate through, and/or winter within Iran. This juxtaposition of habitats has been found to be important for migrating Sociable Lapwings in southwest Russia (Field *et al* 2007).

The species was recorded for the first time in extreme northeast Iran 13 and 14 October 2010, when seven adult Sociable Lapwings in winter plumage were observed by AK and SBM in alfalfa fields around the village of Sarakhs, near the border of Iran and Turkmenistan (37° 36' 22" N, 61° 70' 29.8" E). The use of cropped fields *eg* alfalfa on migration has been recorded in other countries, such as Turkey (Sheldon *et al* in press).

In February 2009 a single bird was observed by FE around Eshq-Abad, Ghaleh-Now wetland (Figure 1), southeast of Tehran. On 14 November 2007, two Sociable Lapwings were observed by MM in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province in a grassland habitat 100 m north of the Gandoman wetland (31° 50' 53.7" N, 51° 07' 53.1" E, Figure 1). On 8 January 2008, during the mid-winter waterbirds census at Boonji coast, Jask area, Hormozgan province (25° 54' 39" N, 57° 16' 59" E, Figure 1), a Sociable Lapwing was observed by MG in



Plate 3. Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*, Miankaleh wildlife refuge, Iran, 10 March 2009. © Meysam Ghasemi

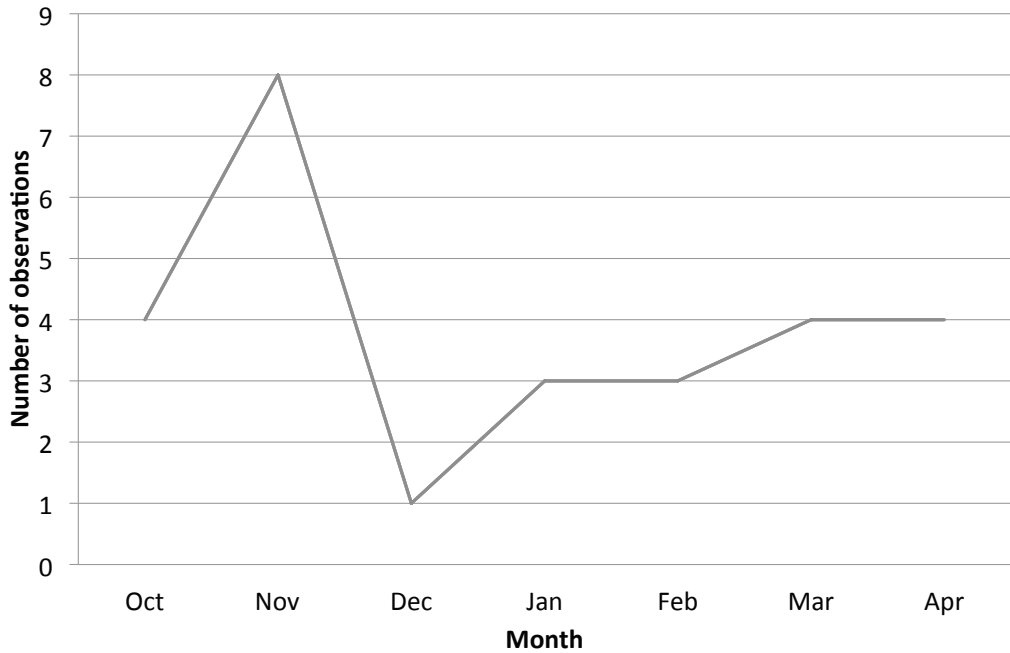


Figure 2. Number of observations by month of Sociable Lapwings *Vanellus gregarius* (October–April) in Iran, based on Table 1.

a sandy habitat. On 5 April 2011, AH observed a single Sociable Lapwing within a flock of 5 White-tailed Plovers *Vanellus leucurus* near Gharaghashlagh wetland in East Azarbaijan province in shallow water (c10–15 cm deep, 37° 12' 50" N, 45° 56' 11" E, Figure 1).

POTENTIAL KEY THREATS

Many of the observations of Sociable Lapwings within Iran have been associated with grassland habitats close to wetlands. As such, any changes in management such as increased agricultural production may reduce the amount of habitat available for the species. For example, the observed conversion of riverside grassland of the Tajan river (northeast Iran) to arable farmland and the associated disturbance from farming activities could be a significant threat to the species. The species is often seen with Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* in the unprotected grasslands and farmlands of northern Iran and might be under threat by hunters perhaps using nets at the edge of wetlands and farmlands. Although the Sociable Lapwing is a protected species in Iran and their hunting and capture is banned (Ashoori 2009) there is perhaps a lack of awareness amongst local hunters. Hunting has been identified in other range states as a key threat to the species (Sheldon *et al* in press) and this issue warrants further attention in Iran.

STATUS AND SUMMARY

Scott & Adhami (2006) categorised the Sociable Lapwing as a scarce and irregular passage migrant in Iran. Based on our inspection of records since 1950 we recommend that the species be treated rather as an irregular passage migrant with occasional over-wintering (Table 1, Figure 2). The records from November may suggest late birds migrating further south, but the December and January observations imply that small numbers are over-

wintering. Further studies and an increase in survey effort are required to confirm this, and also to assess the importance of Iran as a range state for this critically endangered migratory species.

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- Abbas Ashoori, Gilan Provincial Office, Department of the Environment, Rasht, Iran. abbasashoori67@gmail.com
- Ali Khani, Khorasan-e Razavi Provincial Office, DoE, Sabzevar, Iran.
- Meysam Ghasemi, Hormozgan Provincial Office, DoE, Bandar Abbas, Iran.
- Koros Rabiee, Mazandaran Provincial Office, DoE, Sari, Iran.
- Mehrdad Mansoori, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Provincial Office, DoE, Broojen, Iran.
- Seyed Babak Musavi, No 5, Sattari 24, Vakil-Abad, Mashhad, Iran.
- Alireza Hashemi, Tarlan Birdwatching, Tehran, Iran.
- Farshad Eskandari, Department of Environment, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahwaz, Iran.